

Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge Suicide Prevention Committee

Town Hall Meeting

6:30 to 8 p.m.

Monday, May 22, 2006

Santa Barbara City College

721 Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara, CA

Meeting Summary

AT A GLANCE

- 1) Local leaders and residents overwhelmingly support the idea of constructing a pedestrian barrier on the Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge on Highway 154 to prevent suicides. An audience poll at the meeting resulted in nearly everyone raising a hand in support of the barrier.
- 2) Caltrans will investigate the potential of state or federal funding to construct a proposed barrier on the bridge. If the proposed project qualifies for state transportation funding, it could be built within two years or less.
- 3) The Santa Barbara County Search and Rescue Team, comprised of local volunteers, recently adopted a resolution supporting the Cold Spring Bridge Committee's suicide prevention efforts. A team representative verbally read the resolution during the meeting.

MEETING PURPOSE

About 50 people attended the public forum. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss strategies for preventing suicides at Cold Spring Bridge and obtain community input on them. The meeting also addressed rescue and recovery operations, and understanding and preventing suicide.

PRESENTATIONS

- Nevin Sams, Caltrans District Traffic Safety Engineer, began the meeting with a PowerPoint presentation on *Preventing Suicides at Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge*.
- Commander Dominick Palera of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department showed a brief video of a recent suicide rescue at Cold Spring Bridge. He also discussed the safety of public safety personnel during rescue and recovery operations.
- Dr. Lisa Firestone of The Glendon Association gave a PowerPoint presentation on *Understanding and Preventing Suicide*.

KEY POINTS

- The Cold Spring Bridge committee was formed to investigate the suicide issue and identify possible means to reduce suicide.
- Law enforcement personnel—and search and rescue workers and volunteers—risk their own lives and limbs responding to suicide incidents.
- Pedestrian barriers have proven nation-wide to be the most effective strategy for preventing bridge-related suicides.

- Barriers can be built with aesthetic priorities.
- Interim fencing—such as a chain-link fence—is effective in reducing suicides, but could interrupt the process of installing a permanent barrier with aesthetic features if the community objects to its appearance.
- A barrier is estimated to cost between \$200,000 to \$300,000.
- Studies show that when people are prevented from jumping, they do **not** go on to commit suicide by other means.
- Mental health professionals support efforts to reduce access to lethal means and methods of self-harm.
- Cold Spring Bridge is a visual resource that may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. As such, the proposed barrier may be subject to several environmental review and permitting processes.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS (Public input phase of town hall meeting)

- 1) We have the best architects in the world here. We should challenge the designers for this project.
Caltrans has architectural designers at Headquarters. We'll work with the community to come up with the appropriate design.
- 2) It's very important to take away the means to take one's own life. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. At a separate meeting tonight, the Mental Health Association of Santa Barbara County voted unanimously to support the barrier and any other options the Cold Spring committee recommends.
- 3) 2-1-1 averages one suicide call per day in Santa Barbara County. ACCESS teams also get these calls.
- 4) When we're dealing with the value of human life, who cares what an interim barrier looks like?
The proposed strategy is an interim barrier (standard Caltrans fence) with the next phase being the installation of a more elaborate and aesthetic pedestrian barrier.
- 5) Hospice supports the barrier.
- 6) I'd like to commend the committee for their work. People are frustrated because a barrier has not yet been built. People understand about temporary barriers with construction. Imagine losing an officer—we support the committee fully and hope this barrier will move forward as quickly as possible.
- 7) What is the next step?
We'll review the comment cards and determine what the community wants to do. There are several funding possibilities—federal, state, Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, or county Public Works. We're optimistic that funding is not an issue.
- 8) What is triggering the historical criteria for the bridge? It is not yet 50 years old. Make the barrier a project before the bridge is a national landmark—it will take so much longer with environmental and permitting requirements.
We'll involve the environmental community in the process.
- 9) When my son was ill and psychotic, I thought of that bridge. Once a barrier is up, people get used to them and they're not noticeable. I'm not comfortable driving over Cold Spring Bridge without a barrier.
- 10) Caltrans can take three years or more to do a project.
District 5 will make it a priority to expedite a project.
- 11) I recently lost a friend on the bridge. I had no indication of it. Had I known at the time, my impulse would've been to find the \$200,000 to \$300,000, and an architect, and get a barrier built. The barrier to this barrier must be torn down.
District 5 will make it a priority to expedite progress on this issue.

- 12) Supervisor Firestone's office has not yet heard a lot of resistance to the barrier. At first, we were concerned about aesthetics and the costs of a barrier. To expedite the project, we recommend spreading the word and deferring people to our office.
- 13) If you were building a structure like Cold Spring Bridge today, would you build it without a barrier?
Our latest design standards require higher bridge rails with an option for pedestrian barricades.
- 14) I'm all for the barrier. I don't see it as a financial issue. It's a social issue. Is the county and state involved for funding? If the project gets tied up in a bureaucratic process, we need to look at other options. We need an advocate for funding.
The Caltrans Traffic Safety Office is investigating the potential for funding through existing state programs. The pedestrian barricade is not a high cost item, and the District is optimistic that funding sources can be found.
- 15) I'm the mayor of Santa Barbara. I'm on SBCAG and work with Supervisor Firestone. This issue has not yet come to SBCAG. If it fits into a Caltrans program, it would get built faster. Other than that, SBCAG would assist.
- 16) Caltrans has done an amazing job with the committee and stepped up to the plate.
We're not going to drop this issue.
- 17) What's the problem with the Golden Gate Bridge getting a barrier?
There are aesthetic issues, but mostly it's the stigma of mental illness. The mental health community is moving along with public awareness to eliminate the stigma. A study is now looking at the feasibility of a barrier on that bridge—it probably will be built. It's the number one bridge in the world for suicide (The Glendon Association).
- 18) We seem to have support here for the barrier with this group.
- 19) What is the next step? This should not be done in a series of steps.
Caltrans will expedite the process.
- 20) If there were five people who could get the barrier done, who are they?
Your county representative is one, and Supervisor Firestone is working on it. Write letters to the editor. The multi-agency Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge Committee is also in support of the effort.
- 21) We operate the suicide hotline. We had a lot of people calling about suicide last week and we get this fairly often. There might be one life saved between now and when we put up the barrier.
- 22) What has been done to integrate the mental health services in this county?
2-1-1 is an excellent information source along with The Glendon Association and ACCESS. The Glendon Association holds a suicide prevention forum every year and the next one is in September. For more information, contact The Glendon Association at 805-681-0415 or www.glendon.org.
- 23) Will there be a web site for the public to receive information on the proposed barrier project?
Caltrans will soon provide regular updates on its department web page. For more information, contact Jim Shivers, Caltrans public information officer, at 805-549-3237 or info-d5@dot.ca.gov.

COMMENT CARDS

- 14 people noted full support for the pedestrian barrier to be constructed as soon as possible
- Two people advocated the temporary barrier be installed immediately
- Several people endorsed the committee's work on suicide prevention